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## COMMUNIQUE DE PRESSE

## NEWS RELEASE

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***Massacre at Pont-Sondé : National Human Rights Defense Network (RNDDH)  
Demands Immediate Protection of the Population from State Authorities.***

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1. The *National Human Rights Defense Network (RNDDH)* has learned with great dismay of the massacre perpetrated during the night of October 2 to 3, 2024, against the population of Pont-Sondé, located in the 5th communal section of Saint-Marc, in the Artibonite department.

### **I. Unfolding of the Massacre**

2. According to initial information gathered by the RNDDH from its regional branch in the Artibonite department and other community members, on the night of October 2 to 3, 2024, several heavily armed individuals from Savien, all members of the *gran grif* group led by Luckson ELAN, traveled part of the route between Savien and Pont-Sondé by vehicle before entering the Poterie area. Using boats, they invaded Pont-Sondé. This strategy allowed them to catch the self-defense groups, including "The Coalition," off guard, forcing them to flee. After the massacre, the *gran grif* members retreated on foot through the Poterie, killing those they encountered along the way.

3. According to preliminary reports received by the RNDDH, rumors of this massacre had been circulating in Pont-Sondé for at least two months. The armed individuals accused the local population of aligning with members of "The Coalition," who were attempting to curb the criminal activities of the *gran grif* group and prevent them from profiting from a toll they had recently set up on the national highway.

4. Moreover, according to several sources, this massacre could not have been carried out without the help of Ti Pay, a well-known local from Pont-Sondé and a member of the *gran grif* group.

### **II. The Toll of the Pont-Sondé Massacre**

5. The Pont-Sondé massacre resulted in heavy losses, characterized by murders, injuries from gunfire and bladed weapons, and casualties during victims' attempts to flee. Houses, vehicles, and checkpoints were set on fire, leading to the forced displacement of Pont-Sondé's population.

#### **a) Murdered Individuals**

6. Everyone interviewed by the RNDDH mentioned over seventy (70) murdered victims, with several others reported missing. They also estimated that the death toll could rise, as entire families were decimated. Even individuals with babies and young children were killed.

7. As of this report's release, bodies still lie uncollected, as relatives are unable to recover them. For instance, Chelot JOSEPH, aged 40, living in La Poterie, was shot at his home, according to his brother Donald JOSEPH. Not only can Chelot's relatives not return to Pont-Sondé to retrieve his body, but worse, they have no information about the fate of his wife and child.

8. Due to the layout of Pont-Sondé and the ongoing sporadic gunfire in the area, which has made it inaccessible, it is still not possible to present a comprehensive toll of the massacre.

#### **b) Injured Individuals**

9. Dozens of people were injured by gunfire, with some sustaining severe wounds. Many others were injured by sharp weapons or during their escape attempts.

10. The RNDDH spoke with Dr. Frantz ALEXIS, the medical director of Saint Nicolas Hospital, who confirmed that the hospital had treated twenty-three (23) patients with gunshot wounds. Eight (8) of them required emergency surgery. Currently, thirteen (13) patients remain under observation. Although the situation was unforeseen, the medical director noted that, with the hospital being supported by *Zanmi Lasante*, they were able to provide the necessary care despite some medication shortages.

11. Additionally, five (5) individuals who had already died before arriving at the hospital were still taken there.

#### **c) Burned Houses, Vehicles, and Checkpoints**

Several houses, vehicles, and checkpoints were set on fire, forcing survivors to seek refuge elsewhere or at the *Philippe Guerrier* public square in Saint-Marc. For instance:

- The house of Roseline SANON, whose husband is paralyzed, was set on fire. During the attack, she had to seek help to transport him. Currently, Roseline SANON, her husband, and their five (5) children, the youngest of whom is ten (10) years old, are sheltering at the aforementioned public square.
- The house of Maranatha CASIMIR was also set on fire. She is currently staying at the public square with her three (3) children.

#### **d) Forced Displacement of the Population**

12. Since October 3, 2024, hundreds of families fleeing the violence of the *gran grif* group have taken refuge at the *Philippe Guerrier* public square in Saint-Marc. To escape, these victims had to hide, walk for hours, and pass by numerous corpses, as recounted by several people interviewed by the RNDDH, including Jameson FERMILUS and Donald JOSEPH. For example:

- Initially, Jameson FERMILUS hid in a corridor near his house. Later, he walked for hours to reach the *Philippe Guerrier* public square.
- Donald JOSEPH, father of three children aged eight (8), six (6), and two (2), with a wife nine months pregnant, fled their home and walked for several hours. His wife and children were taken in by a woman they had never met before the massacre. Donald JOSEPH is now at the *Philippe Guerrier* public square.

### **III. Comments and Recommendations**

13. The Pont-Sondé massacre significantly adds to the thousands of victims of violent acts committed by armed gangs, who have enjoyed impunity for many years.

14. The new state authorities, **put in place** by the international community, had promised to restore order and security in the country. However, nothing has changed since they assumed office. They have merely drained state coffers, granting themselves all sorts of privileges while leaving the population to the mercy of armed gangs. Indeed, since the Presidential Transition Council (CPT) led by Edgard LEBLANC Fils was formed five (5) months ago, and the government led by Garry CONILLE three (3) months ago, no measures have been taken to retake control of gang-occupied areas, disarm the gangs, arrest them, bring them to justice, and convict them in proportion to their crimes.

15. The police force, criticized by the Pont-Sondé population for not intervening on the night of October 2 to 3, 2024, only arrived on the scene with an armored vehicle on October 4, 2024—more than twenty-four (24) hours after the massacre.

16. With over seventy (70) people killed, including babies, children, women, and the elderly; several missing persons; dozens injured by gunfire (twenty-three (23) treated at Saint Nicolas Hospital); many others injured by sharp weapons or during their escape; numerous houses, cars, and checkpoints burned; and hundreds of families forced to seek refuge at the *Philippe Guerrier* public square: the Pont-Sondé massacre demonstrates the ineffectiveness of the intelligence services of the Prime Minister's Office, the Presidency, the Ministry of the Interior and Local Authorities, and the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, as the funds allocated to these entities are not being used as intended.

17. The RNDDH reminds us that the Haitian National Police (PNH) receives a meager sum of three million (3,000,000) gourdes per month for its intelligence services, while the Presidential advisers, including two (2) observers, each receive five million (5,000,000)

gourdes—1.5 times more than the police institution—for a supposedly "intelligence" service that has proven ineffective.

18. The RNDDH believes that—since rumors about the planning of this massacre and its motives had been circulating in Pont-Sondé for over two (2) months—if the funds allocated to the intelligence services of the aforementioned state structures had been used appropriately, the Pont-Sondé massacre could have been prevented.

19. The RNDDH urges state authorities, particularly the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, to stop issuing ineffective statements and injunctions in response to massacres and armed attacks by gangs. Such actions do nothing to restore order and security in the country.

20. Based on the above, the RNDDH recommends that state authorities:

- Actively pursue the armed gang members of the *gran grif* group led by Luckson ELAN, including Ti Pay, an influential member of the group, without whose assistance the Pont-Sondé massacre could not have unfolded as it did;
- Initiate legal action against all these armed individuals to ensure they are brought to justice and receive appropriate sentences for their crimes;
- Implement programs to provide psychological and financial support to the entire population of Pont-Sondé, especially those now sheltering at the *Philippe Guerrier* public square, who have been deeply traumatized by the attack and fled with nothing.

21. Finally, the RNDDH recommends that the CPT and the Prime Minister's Office forgo the funds allocated to them for their ineffective intelligence services and instead redirect these resources to the police force to strengthen its ability to protect the population and maintain public order.

**Port-au-Prince, October 4, 2024**